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SOCIAL CLASS AND CHILD-REARING PRACTICES.

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THE BEHAVIORAL NORMS OF LOWER CLASS DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN ARE DIFFERENT FROM CHILDREN IN MORE MIDDLE CLASS GROUPS. THE BEHAVIOR OF LOWER CLASS CHILDREN IS INFLUENCED NOT ONLY BY GENERAL SOCIAL CLASS AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND BUT ALSO BY SUCH SPECIFIC INTRACLASS VARIABLES AS FAMILY ENVIRONMENT. THE PRESENT ABSENCE IN THE LITERATURE AND IN PRACTICE OF ANY SYSTEMATIC FRAMEWORK OF DIFFERENTIATED CRITERIA FOR DIFFERENT POPULATION GROUPS MAY OBSCURE CERTAIN BEHAVIORAL SHIFTS OCCURRING AMONG LOWER CLASS CHILDREN WHEN THEY ARE OBSERVED IN A MIDDLE CLASS SETTING. TO DEMONSTRATE THE DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF CHILD REARING PRACTICES ON A CHILD'S BEHAVIOR AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT, A STUDY OF A GROUP OF 3-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN WITH AMERICAN-BORN MIDDLE CLASS PARENTS AND A GROUP OF 3-YEAR-OLD PUERTO RICAN CHILDREN FROM WORKING CLASS HOMES WAS CONDUCTED. IT WAS FOUND THAT IN RESPONSE TO CERTAIN COGNITIVE TASK PERFORMANCE DEMANDS THE MIDDLE CLASS CHILDREN WERE LIKELY TO ENGAGE IN TASK PERFORMANCE BEHAVIOR AND WERE MORE VERBAL THAN WERE THE LOWER CLASS CHILDREN. DIFFERENCES IN THE KIND OF VERBALIZATIONS CHARACTERISTIC OF EACH GROUP WERE ALSO INDICATED. IT WAS ALSO FOUND THAT PUERTO RICAN FAMILIES DO NOT PARTICULARLY EMPHASIZE TASK MASTERY AND STRESS VERBALIZATION FOR SOCIAL REASONS ONLY. IF LOWER CLASS DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN ARE TO ACHIEVE IN TASK-ORIENTED MIDDLE CLASS SOCIETY, THEN KNOWLEDGE OF THESE BEHAVIORAL AND ATTITUDINAL DIFFERENCES MUST BE ACCOUNTED FOR AND PERHAPS EVEN ELIMINATED BY THE SCHOOLS. THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR A.P.A. DIVISIONAL MEETING, NOVEMBER 17, 1967. (LB)

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SOCIAL CLASS AND CHILD-REARING PRACTICES

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Professional workers in the fields of mental health and education are showing an increasing awareness with each passing year that the conditions of life of lower class disadvantaged children may produce special psychological and educational problems for such children. This awareness is reflected in the extensive and continuously growing body of studies of the relationship between a child's economic and cultural background and specific features of his physical, psychological and educational development and functioning. On the practical side, the concern for the special problems of the disadvantaged child has led to a number of remedial programs of large scope by federal, state and municipal agencies and private foundations.

In view of the best of studies already reported it is indeed surprising that so little is still known as to specific behavioral characteristics of various groups of lower class children and the relationship of such characteristics to parental child-care practices and other features of the early home environment. It is true that a number of workers have reported deficiences or distortions in motivational patterns, social attitudes, language usage and cognitive style of such children and related such findings to impoverishment of intellectual and perceptual stimulation received by these children in their early years. However, a recent review of this literature by a leading authority in the field concludes that "The bulk of the literature on the disadvantaged child makes little or no pretense at systematic inquiry, but is frankly speculative or descriptive. Its predominant emphasis is on a wide range of educational approaches and programs- - preschool through college - which are designed to compensate for presumed inadequacies in the primary socialization of the children of the poor. These rapidly increasing reports and discussions of

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compensatory educational programs abound in ad hoc premises, trial-and-error practices, and subjective appraisals." (1).

A number of reasons can be identified for this continued paucity of knowledge:

1. Systematic criteria for the categorization of group behavioral norms for disadvantaged children of specific socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and for the identification of the psychiatrically disturbed disadvantaged child do not exist. Such systematic criteria for the normal and deviant child have been established only for middle class groups. The issue is well stated in a recent article on the behavior of deprived children in a nursery school setting, "At present, however, knowledge of these children and their special needs is deduced by guesses." (2). It is clearly of prime importance to be able to distinguish those behavioral deviations which represent functional adaptive responses to the disadvantaged child's life experiences and environment from those which represent idiosyncratic maladaptive patterns of psychopathology. The former group represents those children who are psychiatrically healthy, who are functioning according to the norm of their lower-class disadvantaged group, and who can be expected to respond positively to appropriate teaching methods. The latter group represents the psychiatrically disturbed children who may require special teaching techniques and interpersonal approaches, and, in many cases, psychiatric consultation and treatment.

The absence of systematic knowledge of the behavioral norms of disadvantaged children has led all too often to the uncritical application of middle class norms to such children, resulting frequently in significant errors in diagnosis and treatment (3). Professional workers, whether psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers or teachers, in dealing with disadvantaged children have minimized such errors only through ad hoc, impressionistic and intuitive evaluations of each individual case. This has been the senior author's own experience in several decades of work in child guidance centers in the Harlem and lower East Side areas of Manhattan with lower class children of

Puerto Rican, Negro and other cultural backgrounds. During this same period, the ubiquitousness with which middle class norms have been applied to disadvantaged children by even thoughtful and serious professional trainees is evident in the training and supervision of medical students, psychiatric residents, psychologists, social workers, nurses and child-care center personnel. The absence of a body of systematic and detailed information on the behavioral norms of disadvantaged children has made it necessary to orient each trainee by individual preceptorship based on empirical experience with individual children.

The application of non-differentiated criteria to differing segments of the population has not allowed, in theory or in practice, for the behavioral shifts which may take place when a group of lower-class children is placed within a middle class setting. Dr. Robert Coles describes these behavioral differences in his observations of the children of migrant farmers:

"There is a striking difference in the relationship between the child and his family 'at home' or in travel, and the child at school, in the fields, even on the streets. At home, the children play together easily and warmly. They are very free with their parents, and their parents with them. Open expression of love and demonstrations of it are seen....Their children are much less secretive, resort to much less furtive and symbolic maneuvers to express their attachment and direct love for their parents, and also their anger. Yet in contrast to such physical intimacy and propinquity, openness of feeling and of anger, closeness of relationship between children, when migrant children meet many people on the 'outside' (as their parents are apt to refer to anyone from a teacher to a farm manager) they often appear isolated, guarded, withdrawn, suspicious and apathetic or dull.

"Thus, in many respects migrant children are brought up to have two rather explicit ways of responding to the two worlds of their families and 'others'. Though of course all children learn a version of that kind of distinction, there is a <u>contrast</u> to the twofold behavior in migrant children, a sharpness to that

differentiation, that is quite special. It is at times uncannily as if they had two sets of attitudes, two personalities, one for their family, one for the rest of the world." (4)

These observations suggest strongly, as do the findings of other workers, that if lower class youngsters are seen only briefly and by examiners who differ from them in social class and ethnic origin it is difficult to establish the type of rapport conducive to best functioning (5,6). Consequently, in many instances one cannot decide whether the obtained performance is the product of poor relations of the child with the examiner or a true measure of the child's capacities.

3. The category "lower class children" is not a homogeneous one. Marked differences in family structure, parental practices and attitudes, economic status, ethnic background can exist which may result in significantly different influences on psychological development. Thus, Pavenstedt (7) has pointed out that the behavior in nursery school situations of lower class children from disorganized home environments differs markedly from that observed in children of the same ethnicity and social class but from stable families and home situations. In the absence of detailed knowledge about familial organization and other associated aspects of the familial microenvironment, it is difficult to decide whether differences in performance derive from differences in social and cultural background or from differences in family stability and organization.

Behavioral functioning may be influenced by levels of general health, neurological intactness and perceptual and intellectual functioning. This consideration is especially pertinent to the study of lower class children, in view of the evidence that the conditions of life to which such children are exposed both prenatally and postnatally can have significant unfavorable influences on all phases of their development and functioning (8,9).

There are a number of different aspects to psychological functioning, such as overt motor behavior, patterns of emotional expressiveness, temperament, language usage, style of social functioning, cognitive characteristics, etc. As a

result, behavioral investigations of lower class children can take many directions as regards the specific characteristics to be studied. It is likely that comprehensive knowledge of behavioral norms of lower class children will be best obtained by a series of such selectively focused studies.

With the above considerations in mind, we would like to summarize briefly one of our recent studies comparing a specific attribute of psychological functioning of two populations of children of different ethnic and class background and relating the findings to differences in child rearing practices of the two groups. The findings have been reported in detail in a monograph which is now in press (10).

The study is part of a larger ongoing research project in which the behavioral development of two groups of children have been followed longitudinally from early infancy onward. One population comprises 136 children with highly educated native born middle and upper middle class parents. The other population comprises 95 children with Puerto Rican unskilled or semiskilled working class parents. Family stability was similar in both groups and there was no difference between them in the incidence of prematurity and complications of pregnancy and delivery. The number of children with deviant developmental courses with respect to the achievement of motor landmarks was very small in both groups and not significantly different between them.

At age 3 years all children in both samples were tested using the Stanford-Binet Form L. The Puerto Rican children were all examined by a bilingual Puerto Rican psychologist who tested either in Spanish or English on the basis of her estimate of the language in which the child possessed greatest competence. Rapport between the psychologist and the children was especially good in that fully one-half of the middle class and all of the Puerto Rican children were well acquainted with the psychologist as a consequence of other phases of the longitudinal study.

At the time each child was being examined a detailed protocol of the child's behavior and verbalizations in full was obtained by an independent

observer seated unobtrusively in a corner of the examination room. These behavioral protocols were analyzed according to a conceptual scheme in which each item of the psychometric test was considered as a demand on the child for task performance (stringing beads, block building, copying of a circle, picture identification, etc.). Irrespective of whether a child's answer to an item was correct or not his response could either reflect a decision to engage himself with the task demand (work) or to fail to make such an engagement (not-work). This initial bifurcation could either be expressed through verbalization or through action. If the decision were to work, whether verbally or non-verbally, the response could be delimited and restricted to the defined requirements of the task, or extend beyond these limits in the form of spontaneous associations or other expressions in action or speech. If the initial decision made by the child was not to work this could be expressed either verbally or non-verbally as well, and take the form of negations and expressions of motive, rationalizations of competence, substitutive verbalizations or actions, requests for assistance, or passive non-participation. Clearly the child's initial response could either be continued or altered in response to the reiteration of demand by the examiner. Thus initial work responses could be followed by refusals to work, verbal responses by action, or by any other pattern of consistency or change. The scheme of analysis, therefore, made it possible to classify both initial responses and to engage in a sequential analysis of response chains.

Using this analytical scheme all the behavioral protocols were scored quantitatively which permitted a number of comparisons between the two groups of children. The comparisons were made between 118 of the middle class children and 60 of the Puerto Rican children. Significant differences between the two groups were found.

The middle class children characteristically responded to demands for cognitive functioning by making a greater proportion of work responses than did the Puerto Rican children. This tendency of the middle class children more readily to engage in task orientated behavior was expressed both in their initial responses to a demand for cognitive performance and in relation to the ease with

which an initial failure to work was converted to a work response on re-presentation of the demand. In contrast, the Puerto Rican children examined were less likely to make an initial work response to a demand for cognitive performance and were less likely to shift from an initial not-work response to a work response upon re-presentation of the demand.

Perhaps the most pervasive difference between the two groups was the tendency of the middle class children to respond very much more frequently to the cognitive demands by verbalization rather than by action or gesture. The increased use of verbalization on the part of the middle class children occurred both when the response made was a work response or when it was a not-work one. This tendency is strikingly reflected in the tendency of the Puerto Rican children to use passive and silent unresponsiveness very frequently.

In addition to differences in the overall amount of verbalization, differences existed in the kinds of verbalizations that were made when the children failed to work. In the middle class group the largest single type of expression through which not-work responses were expressed was an ability related rationalization. The children would respond to a demand by making such remarks as "I don't know how to do it yet," "I'm too little to do it," or "I haven't learned that yet." In contrast the most frequent of the verbal not-work responses in the Puerto Rican children was irrelevant substitution. Characteristically these children would fail to respond to a demand for cognitive performance by making such statements as "I want my mommy," "I want to play with the toys," "I want to go home," or "I want a drink of water.

The findings were unchanged when differences in I.Q. level and ordinal position were controlled. The Puerto Rican families were not characterized by overcrowding, substandard housing or geographical instability. The families were stable, all the fathers were employed and the children were not deprived of maternal care. Thus, these Puerto Rican children do not derive from the so-called "culture of poverty" described by Oscar Lewis and explanations based on such a concept do not account for their behavioral style. In addition, the

test procedures were not carried out in an unfamiliar language, and the examiner was of a similar ethnic group and well known to the families. In the test situation the children were cooperative and demonstrated their friendliness to the examiner by hugging and kissing her on arrival and departure.

Our hypothesis as to the cause of the difference in functioning of the two groups of children derive from certain impressions gained in the course of our longitudinal studies as to differences in certain specific child care attitudes and practices. It has been our impression that in the middle class families task orientation and task completion in play and in interaction between parent and child were emphasized. The atmosphere in the Puerto Rican families appeared to be one that encouraged social interactions rather than task completion. This difference was reflected not only in relation to the children, but more generally in expressed attitudes and behaviors related to concepts of time and scheduling.

The reactions of the two groups of mothers to the interviewer who was following the behavioral development of the children were strikingly different. Interviews with the middle class mothers were conducted in a businesslike atmosphere. Specific arrangements were made by the parent so that she could be alone with the interviewer. Visitors and interruptions by children were discouraged, or if unavoidable, apologized for. Adherence to a time schedule, often strictly structured, was the rule, and social amenities, when they occurred, always followed the conclusion of business. In the Puerto Rican families the coming of the interviewer was treated as a social occasion, almost always accompanied by offers of coffee or a meal. The interviewer was frequently asked to baby-sit while the mother went out to shop or fetched other children from school. Visitors were welcomed, and encouraged to stay. The interview often required a full day as it was frequently interrupted and only resumed when other social and household obligations were minimally pressing. The attitude was always one of interest and friendliness, but expressed in a style that was clearly distinguishable from the "business is business and pleasure is pleasure" atmosphere characteristic of the middle class homes.

Differences between the two groups with respect to child care practices were also noted. In the middle class group the mothers were very much concerned with the age at which their children could assume responsibility for and exhibit skill in carrying out activities of daily living and self-care. They often expressed values that indicated that in their view the earlier a child was able to feed himself, dress himself, tie his shoes, etc. the better. Precocity in task mastery had high prestige and status value for these families. At points, however, these attitudes of the middleclass parents were in conflict with strongly inculcated attitudes towards permissiveness in feeding and toileting that this group of mothers felt were desirable. Consequently, toilet training and weaning from the bottle appeared to be areas in which little pressure for task mastery was exerted. With these two exceptions, however, the atmosphere was one which favored and was organized to produce regular and systematic improvements in skill.

The atmosphere in the Puerto Rican homes was quite different, and was one in which not only weaning and toilet training represented unpressured areas, but where these were merely two among a multitude of circumstances in which pressures for achievement were absent. In addition to expressing a lack of concern with the achievement of skills in the areas of self-care, the Puerto Rican mothers frequently actively discouraged the efforts of their children to feed or to dress themselves. With many children to care for and no household help these mothers had to take their children with them whenever they went shopping or visiting. They accounted for their failure to encourage their children to become proficient in dressing or feeding by saying "If I do it for him, I get done faster, I have too many things to do."

Although the amount of conversation and verbal exchange was at least as great in the homes of the Puerto Rican children as in the middle class group, the use of language appeared to differ in at least two respects. In contrast to the middle class mothers who verbally described tasks to be done, in the Puerto Rican group there was a greater tendency for verbalization to be social in character rather than task directed. Further, while the middle class mothers

tended to make sure that verbal instructions were understood and carried out, when verbalizations were task directed, in the Puerto Rican group, there was a tendency on the part of these mothers to exhibit little insistence that the instructions or directions be acted upon.

Patterns of play in general appeared to be different in the two groups. While the middle class parents considered toys to be a source of educational experience, in the Puerto Rican group they were received as amusements rather than as a means of developing achievment skills. So-called educational toys were not often present and play was usually left entirely to the whim of the child. In contrast to the middle class group, where the parents were often actively involved in the children's play, the Puerto Rican parents generally did not introduce the children to a new toy or game and tended to intervene only if the child developed difficulties. Again in contrast to the middle class parents, who encouraged mastery, intervention in the Puerto Rican group was directed towards solving the problem for the child. Little effort was expended in directing the child towards the solution of his difficulties himself.

These characteristics of family atmosphere and parent-child interaction all may contribute to the production of a life style in the Puerto Rican group that fosters the development of the kinds of patterns observed when behavior in response to demands for cognitive functioning is examined. It may be that the Puerto Rican children derive from a person oriented rather than a problem oriented culture and lack sufficient opportunity for the exercise of independence in advance of task mastery to permit the development of successful problem solving behavior under conventional educational conditions. The style of the culture may be one in which verbalizations are used to communicate affective and social contents rather than task directed ones, with the result that the ability to engage in verbal behavior in the service of solving a cognitive demand fails to develop adequately.

In order to evaluate the worth of these hypotheses it other than an impressionistic way it will be necessary to obtain detailed data on the styles

of parental practice, the atmosphere in the home with respect to tasks and their mode of execution, evidence on the manner in which the child is introduced to responsibility for self-care, and the values and attitudes of parents towards achievment and mastery by their children. For these reasons we are continuing to collect data on parental attitudes, styles and practices, and it is to be hoped that as a fuller picture of both the life styles and patterns of child care in the Puerto Rican group emerge, certain of these possibilities for which we have strong impressions may be empirically confirmed or rejected. Alternatively others may be able to be advanced to replace those which fail to fit the facts.

Independently of speculations with respect to the origins of differences in response style, there can be little doubt that 3 year old lower class Puerto Rican and middle class children do differ from one another in their styles of response to demands for cognitive functioning. Moreover, these different styles, manifest at three years of age can, if persisted in, make enormous differences in the effectiveness with which the conventional educational setting will be effective in stimulating educational growth and mastery in the two groups of children. If the patterns described continue to define the developmental course of the two groups of children they can only result in a much enhanced likelihood for school failure and under-achievement in the Puerto Rican children, and for school success in the middle class children.

It should be clear that the behavioral pattern of the Puerto Rican children does not derive in any way from parental indifference or rejection. Nor does it indicate any inferiority or deficiency in the children. Rather it represents a learned pattern which might be optimal for some other environment but does place the children at a disadvantage in our task-oriented society. Such a disadvantage can, however, be minimized or even eliminated if the school develops an orientation to its teaching responsibilities which takes into account the specific task performance responses of these children.

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